

Oodles of Poodles

**Written & Illustrated
by
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Baggy Gator was in a risk-taking mood as he sat in his easy chair and looked at his mail. He was trying to decide which envelopes were bills and should be either opened last or, better yet, not at all.

He saw a letter from his sister, Snipper. He opened it with excitement, hoping for good news. It read:

“Dear brother Baggy,

Well, Biff and I took off for Hawaii to do our second honeymoon after they drained Niagara Swamp. Hawaii is nice, but you all said there were swamps in Hawaii and, Baggy dear, let me assure you that there are none. We've looked. We asked the tour guides. We did everything. No swamps.

So, Biff and I are off again to look for another place to second honeymoon. Thanks for keeping Little Nipper for us while we do it. You're sweet.

Love. . . Snipper”

Baggy laid the letter down and gulped hard. He loved his nephew Little Nipper and wished he could say that he loved the messes the precocious prankster got him into. He looked down at the pile of mail again. One of the envelopes caught his attention. Printed on the outside was an eye-catching phrase:

You are a Winner!



“Hmmm,” said Baggy, “I’m a winner, huh? Let’s see.” He opened the letter and read:

“Congratulations! You have won the NAME THE CEREAL contest. Out of 20,000 submissions of names for our new cereal, your entry was chosen the winner. Our judges loved it and were convinced that it will be a best-seller on the cereal shelf in supermarkets across the USA.”

“So, if I’m a winner,” said Baggy, “what have I won?”

“‘What have I won?’ you are probably asking yourself. You have won a lifetime supply of this amazing cereal. You will never go without breakfast again. Truckloads are even now on the way to your hometown to deliver it. Enjoy!”

When mysterious circumstances occur, only one name comes to Baggy’s lips.

“Nipper!” he called. “Oh, Little Nipper. My neat, nifty nephew. May I see you in the living room, please.”

Little Nipper came into the room, a questioning look on his face. “What is it, unca Baggy?”

“I just got a letter telling me I’m a winner in a ‘Name the Cereal’ contest. What contest? What cereal? I never entered a contest. I didn’t know anything about a contest. Do you know anything about it?” babbled Baggy without pausing for breath.

“We won the cereal naming contest? Oh boy!” whooped Nipper. “We won, we won, we won,” he cheered, bouncing around the living room and doing cartwheels.

Baggy collapsed back into his chair. “Tell me about it.”

“It’s just a contest I wanted to enter. So I entered you.” Nipper paused and looked down at his feet apologetically. “I’m just a minor,” he said.



“Which cereal and which contest?” asked Baggy.

“Well, you know how cereal always has to be shaped like something. Makes it more interesting,” said Nipper.

“Yeah, I’ve known cereals to be shaped like animals, honeycombs, stars, moons,” replied Baggy.

“Oh, that was way back in your days, unca Baggy. Things have changed since then. Now cereal is shaped like things we kids can identify with today. That’s what this cereal you named was shaped like.”

“Shaped like what?”

“Why DNA molecules, of course. DNA molecules linked and chained together into delicious strands. Yummy!”

“I remember when cereal was just shaped fun and looked cute. On the back of the box were simple games and puzzles to have fun with. Don’t you ever crave to have a little fun?”

“Fun? Unca Baggy,” Nipper said disapprovingly. “When there are subjects that are so much more important? The serious mind wants serious things to contemplate and consider.”

“And what, may I ask, professor, was ‘*my*’ winning name that ‘*I*’ gave this DNA molecule shaped cereal?”

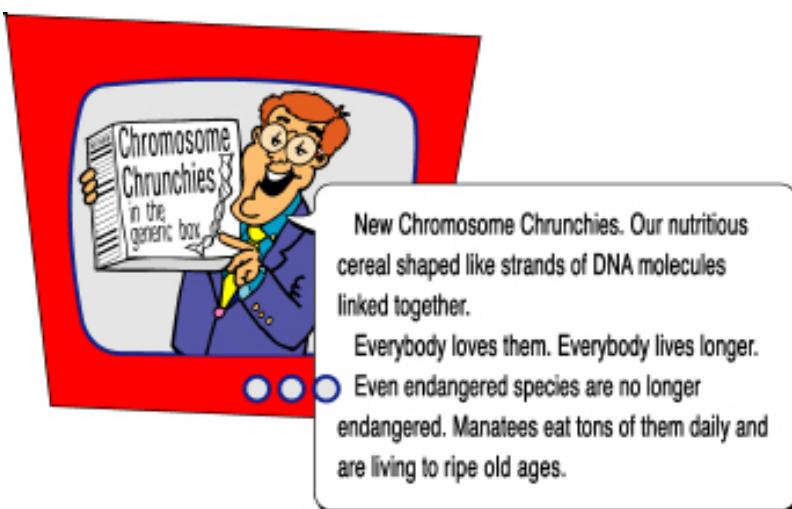
“Chromosome Chrunchies.”

Every now and then Baggy goes quiet and gets a blank look on his face. Dumbfounded is the better word. He did this now and looked at Nipper.

“Chromosome Crunchies,” he finally said in a low voice. “Chromosome Crunchies is, I believe, what I heard. Right?”

“Right as rain, unca Baggy, but with an ‘H’ in Crunchies. Goes along with the ‘H’ in Chromosomes. Chromosomes and DNA are the same thing.”

Something caught Nipper’s eye on the television. He pointed excitedly. “Oh look, unca Baggy. There it is, already on TV. A commercial for Chromosome Chrunchies!”



Baggy sighed and shook his head in disbelief. A knock came on the front door.

“Now who’s knocking at this time on a Saturday morning?” said Baggy. He went to see who it was.

He opened the door and saw standing there in her typical 60’s styled clothing and holding a not-so-typical poodle in her arms was Lillia DiValli, his very best buddy.

“Lillia,” exclaimed Baggy. “What’s that in your arms and what are you doing here?”

“In that order, it’s a poodle and I’m dropping him off,” replied Lillia.



“What?” shouted Baggy.

“I’m dropping him off. Surely you heard me that time. Am I slurring my words?”

“You mean you want me to take care of this unknown dog?”

“Very good, Baggy. You do catch on fast. I’m impressed at your quick mind,” said Lillia as she scooted past Baggy and made her way into the house.

“I told my Aunt Frieda I’d watch her new poodle while she’s gone for the day. And then...”

She put the dog down.

The worst was yet to come. Baggy winced and waited.

“...and then I read in the paper of a seminar at the college that I want to take. It takes place today only, so I need to have you watch him while I’m in class.”

Lillia is rather hyperactive with an agile mind. She loves trying and learning new things, but is constantly overdoing it by taking on more things than her time and schedule can manage. That’s where Baggy comes in — to baby-sit her overloads.

“What class are you taking, aunt Lillia?” asked Nipper who was petting the new pooch.

“I’m going to learn cosmetology,” she replied.

“Cosmetology. Good class,” said Baggy, who had calmed down. “You’ll enjoy being weightless in space.”

“You’re thinking of cosmonauts. I’ll be studying cosmetology,” said Lillia, impatiently.

“Ohhhh,” said Baggy, “cosmetology. Well, you’ll like that, too. I’m Virgo. Nipper is Pisces. What are you?”

Lillia glared at Baggy, her brows furrowing.

“I’m fuming!”

“Hmmmm. That’s a new sign to me. Fuming . . . what month is that?” asked Baggy, quite puzzled.

“Cosmetology,” yelled Lillia, now exasperated, “is the study of hair cutting. I’m going to learn to cut and style hair!”

Baggy bent to pet the poodle and twisted the curly hair on his head. “Hey, you could cut his mop-top. Poof it up or tease it or something.”

“I’ve got to go,” said Lillia, looking at her watch and ignoring Baggy’s comments. “Aunt Frieda is coming back late this afternoon. My class will be through in a few hours, so I’ll get back, pick Foofie up, and be home with him before she gets there. Is that all clear, Mr. Quick-witted?”

“What isn’t clear, my dear, is that word you just used. Foofie. What is a Foofie?”

“Foofie is the dog’s name. Aunt Frieda thought it sounded French, so she named him Foofie.”

“He’s a nice dog, unca Baggy; and smart, too,” said Nipper who got Foofie to stand up on his hind legs by holding a dog biscuit over his nose.



Lillia was already outside and heading down the sidewalk.

“No time to talk about it. I’m late. I’ll be back in three hours. Have Foofie ready to go. Bye-eee. Thanks. You’re a dear.”

Baggy watched as Lillia disappeared into the distance. He turned to go back into the house.

“Nipper, better take Foofie into the kitchen and feed him something. We’re stuck with him for a few hours.”

Little Nipper led the poodle into the kitchen. Baggy sat in his easy chair to finish reading the mail.

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Hours later, at the college, Lillia was wrapping up the seminar on cosmetology. The course was taught by Glitter and Beatnik Bunny, two hairstylists who owned a salon called The Hare-Do Bunnies. Glitter was in her usual frivolous mood and wanted to try something experimental on Lillia's hair. It seemed simple and harmless enough when Glitter explained it. So, Lillia agreed to let her do it.



Later, Baggy finished reading his last letter when the silence was broken by a knock on the door. He went to see who it was. He opened the door and almost screamed in horror at what he saw.

The strange figure was recognizable as Lillia until you got up to the top of the head and saw the hair-do if that's what you could call it.

This so-called style was a large cloud of puffed and poofed up hair which looked like a giant ball of cotton candy.

“Nipper,” cried Baggy at last, “I think the poodle's girlfriend is here for a visit. Go tell him, okay?”

The figure let out a howl. “Baggy Gator! Don’t you say a word. Not a peep about my hair. Not one solitary peep.”

“But, what happened?” asked Baggy, recoiling.

“Well, the class was taught by Glitter and Beatnik Bunny, who usually cut my hair. Anyway, Glitter asked me if she could try some things on my hair. So, I let her.”

“Hmmm,” said Baggy, examining the hair, but not wanting to laugh and make matters worse.



“It’ll wear out,” she bleated. “Give it time. By the way, where is Foofie? I’ve got to get him back before aunt Frieda returns.”

“He’s with Nipper. Nipper was feeding him. I’ll get him.”

He called to the kitchen. “Nipper! Lillia’s back to pick up the poodle. Bring him here, please.”

Nipper’s voice came not from the kitchen, but from his room.

“I don’t have him, unca Baggy,” said Nipper, entering the living room. “I thought you were going to look after him. I only fed him.”

“You were also playing with him. What happened?”

Nipper pointed to the front door that was standing wide open. "Somebody forgot to close the door. Maybe he's outside."

Baggy and Lillia collapsed on the sofa and let out "Oh no!" at the same time,

Finally, Lillia spoke. "I dropped him off just a few hours ago. You mean you've lost him since then?"

"Well, uh, it seems that way," said Baggy.

"Oh no, what will my aunt Frieda say? This is her first poodle. She just got him and he doesn't even have a collar with his name on it."

Nipper's face lit up. He had an idea. He ran out the front door exclaiming, "I've got an idea how to find Foofie. Wait here. I'll be back later."

"Wait," shouted Baggy, "tell us what you're going to do."

"You'll find out," said Nipper as he ran down the street.

Baggy got up and closed the door. He turned to Lillia. "You know, as long as we're waiting for Nipper to try his idea, you can show me what you learned and give me a haircut."

"Would you kindly not mention the word 'hair cut,' please," said Lillia, with a touch of pain in the voice. She began walking through the house shouting "Here, Foofie!" She lifted some of the pillows on the sofa, took a glance, then put them back, and called, "Here, Foofie!" again.

"What are you doing, may I ask?" asked Baggy.

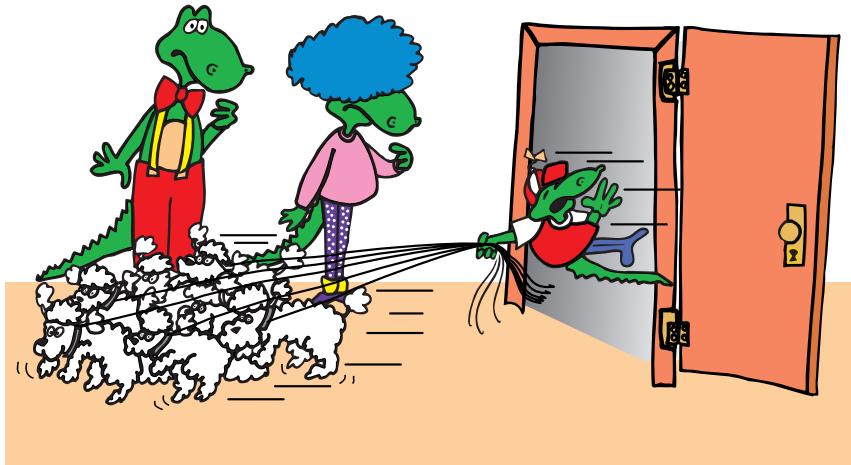
"I'm looking for Foofie here in the house. We have not concluded that he ever went outside and he might still be here, maybe asleep."

"Hmmm," said Baggy nodding in agreement, the sound sense of it all sinking in. He began going through the house calling "Here, Foofie" along with Lillia.

They were interrupted by a banging on the door along with the yipping and howling of dogs. They heard Nipper begging unca Baggy to open the door. Baggy hurried to the door and opened it.

A pack of dogs rushed past Baggy into the house. They were all poodles and all wearing leashes that dragged Nipper along in their path.

“Whoa, whoa!” shouted Nipper as they continued to drag



him mercilessly through the house. “Help, unca Baggy, help!”

Baggy grabbed the leashes out of Nipper’s hand and finally slowed the dogs to a halt.

“What’s going on?” asked Baggy, looking puzzled at the pack of poodles who, in turn, looked puzzled back at him.

“I thought if Foofie was in the neighborhood, I had a scheme to bring out all the neighborhood poodles to see if one of them might be him.”

“What was your scheme?” asked Lillia.

“I painted a sign that said ‘Will walk all poodles for FREE.’ I didn’t have long to wait before all these poodles were handed to me, by different people, for me to walk.”

"Not a bad idea," said Lillia, "but not one of them is Foofie. These poodles have collars and Foofie had none."



Baggy opened his mouth to make a comment but was stopped by a knock at the door.

"This is getting ridiculous," he groaned. "Every time I answer the door, there's a new problem. One of you wouldn't mind answering it, would you?"

"It's your house, Baggy," answered Lillia, sharply.

Baggy shrugged his shoulders and opened the door. It was a man in a truck driver's uniform holding a box of cereal.

"Mr. Gator?" the man inquired.

"Uh, yes," answered Baggy.

"We're delivering your lifetime supply of Chromosome Chrunchies. And here's a box to keep them in. Just sign here."

Baggy signed the receiving form and the man went to the open door and shouted, "Okay Joe, let'er go!"

There was a low rumbling sound that got louder and louder. Suddenly, through the front door poured an avalanche of loose cereal that could refill the box forever. It filled the living room.



The poodles were all hungry from the exercise, so they began to eat the cereal. There was much munching and crunching as they did. Then something began to happen.

The little poodles started to shake and get bigger. Then they got larger. Soon, they were too huge for the house and crashed a large hole in the roof to get outside. The noise was deafening.



“What’s this all about?” cried Baggy over the tumult. He ran outside and was goggling at the hole in his roof.

“It’s the cereal, unca Baggy. It’s the Chromosome Chrunchies!” yelled Nipper, in alarm.

“What about the Chromosome Chrunchies?” cried Lillia, over all the noise.

“DNA is the essence of life and growth,” said Little Nipper. “It must have given the poodles too much life and growth and caused them to get so big. Look, here on the box it says, ‘CAUTION: Unexpected results may occur if poodles eat this cereal.’”

Unexpected things did occur. The giant poodles suddenly got baffled looks on their faces and began to shake again. Then they started shrinking, smaller and smaller.

Soon, they were back to normal size, but still perplexed.

Lillia came running up with a poodle in her arms. It was Foofie. “Look Baggy!” she cheered. “I found Foofie. He was asleep in the laundry hamper and when I walked by, he popped his head out.”

“Hooray!” cried Little Nipper joyfully. “A happy ending. I’ll take the poodles back to their owners and no one will be the wiser. Isn’t that great, unca Baggy?” He paused and looked around. “Where’s unca Baggy, aunt Lillia?”

“He went into the kitchen to get something. Wait, here he comes.”

Baggy came out of the kitchen with a bowl of Chromosome Chrunchies. The bowl was filled to overflowing as Baggy ate the contents with a spoon.

“Baggy Gator,” exclaimed Lillia, “what do you think you are doing eating that cereal? It has unexpected results on different things.”

“I know, I know,” said Baggy, between crunches. “I have a bone to pick with that Chromosome Chrunchies company, and I would like to be the appropriate size when I do.”

He took another bite.

“Mmmm, good,” he mumbled with his mouth full.

The end

